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ORIGIN ARA-01

RELEASED IN PART
B6, B1, 1.4(B), 1.4(D)

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|------|--------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| INFO | LOG-00 | AMAD-01 | CIAE-00 | C-01 | DEAE-00 | HA-09 | H-01 |
| | INM-01 | INRE-00 | INR-01 | L-03 | ADS-00 | NSAE-00 | NSCE-00 |
| | OMB-01 | PA-01 | PM-01 | PRS-01 | P-01 | SNP-01 | SP-01 |
| | SS-01 | TRSE-00 | T-01 | USIE-00 | /027R | | |

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ARA/AND: LBHITTLE

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O 301748Z MAR 92
FM SECSTATE WASHDC
TO AMEMBASSY CARACAS IMMEDIATE
INFO SECDEF WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0000
USSOUTHCOM QUARRY HTS PN IMMEDIATE 0000
AMEMBASSY BOGOTA

C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 099006

E.O. 12356: DECL: OADR

TAGS: PGOV VE

SUBJECT: [REDACTED] ON SITUATION IN VENEZUELA B6, B1

1. CONFIDENTIAL -- ENTIRE TEXT.

2. BEGIN SUMMARY: ACCORDING TO [REDACTED] B1, B6
[REDACTED] SYMPATHY WITHIN THE
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MILITARY FOR THE LEADERS OF THE FEBRUARY 4 COUP IS
DECLINING. THE VENEZUELAN PEOPLE ARE UPSET WITH
CORRUPTION AND THE INEFFECTIVENESS OF PUBLIC SERVICES AND
THE JUDICIARY. THEY DESPERATELY WANT CHANGE. [REDACTED] B1, B6
BELIEVES THE U.S. SHOULD DO MORE TO HELP THE GOV ON TRADE
ISSUES. END SUMMARY.

3. ON MARCH 26 SOUTH AMERICA DAS MCLEAN AND VENEZUELA
DESK OFFICER KAPLAN MET WITH [REDACTED] B1, B6
[REDACTED]

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SITUATION IN THE MILITARY

4. [] NOTED THAT ONLY THE ARMY WAS INVOLVED IN THE FEBRUARY 4 COUP ATTEMPT. AFTER FEBRUARY 4, HOWEVER, SOME OFFICERS IN THE OTHER SERVICES WERE SYMPATHETIC TOWARDS THE COUP PLOTTERS. THERE IS A DISCONNECT BETWEEN HIGHER AND LOWER LEVEL OFFICERS, INCLUDING IN THE NAVY. MOREOVER, THERE ARE A NUMBER OF OFFICERS WHO ENTERED THE ARMED FORCES IN THE 1970S, AFTER THE GOV SUCCESSFULLY PUT DOWN LEFTIST GUERRILLAS, WHO HAVE ROMANTIC LEFTIST IDEAS. DELICATE SURGERY IS NEEDED TO REMOVE THESE OFFICERS WITHOUT HURTING THE ARMED FORCES AS AN INSTITUTION.

B1, B6

5. SYMPATHY WITHIN THE MILITARY FOR LIEUTENANT COLONEL CHAVEZ AND HIS FELLOW PLOTTERS IS ON THE DECLINE, [] OFFICERS ARE UNHAPPY ABOUT THE PUBLICIZED THEFT EARLIER THIS MONTH OF ARMS FROM A CARACAS MILITARY BASE BY AN OFFICER APPARENTLY LINKED TO CHAVEZ'S MOVEMENT. THE ARMS WERE DESTINED FOR LEFTIST GROUPS.

B1, B6

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THIS HAS UPSET MANY IN THE MILITARY WHO BELIEVE ARMING CIVILIANS IS INAPPROPRIATE. MOREOVER, CHAVEZ'S REFUSAL TO APPEAR AT MILITARY COURT PROCEEDINGS UNTIL ALL CONSTITUTIONAL GUARANTEES ARE RESTORED HAS UPSET OFFICERS EAGER TO USE THE PROCEEDINGS TO DEMONSTRATE THEIR INNOCENCE OF INVOLVEMENT IN THE FEBRUARY 4 PLOT. [] IMPLIED THAT CHAVEZ'S REFUSAL TO COOPERATE WAS DELAYING THE PROCESS, BUT NEVERTHELESS INSISTED THAT THE PROCEEDINGS ARE BEING CARRIED OUT WITH A FIRM HAND.) (COMMENT: [] DID NOT DISCUSS THE POSSIBILITY OF RIGHTISTS IN THE MILITARY OPPOSED TO CAP.)

B1, B6

B1, B6

6. [] CLAIMED DEFENSE MINISTER OCHOA'S RECENT APPEARANCE ON TV HAD DONE MUCH TO CALM THE SITUATION. OCHOA MADE A SMALL MISTAKE, HOWEVER--HIS REFERENCE TO INEVITABLE VIOLENCE IF CHANGE DOES NOT OCCUR. SUCH A COMMENT WAS INAPPROPRIATE FOR A MINISTER.

B1, B6

7. MCLEAN EMPHASIZED THAT THE USG IS STRONGLY OPPOSED TO A MILITARY COUP. A COUP WOULD FUNDAMENTALLY DAMAGE VENEZUELA'S RELATIONS WITH THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY. MILITARY TO MILITARY RELATIONS WITH THE U.S., INCLUDING THE SUPPLY RELATIONSHIP, WOULD CEASE. THE VENEZUELAN MILITARY WOULD BECOME "UNTOUCHABLES." [] SAID IT IS

B1, B6

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IMPORTANT THAT YOUNG OFFICERS UNDERSTAND THE STRONG
INTERNATIONAL REPERCUSSIONS OF A COUP. HE APPARENTLY
BELIEVES A BLOCKADE A LIKELY INTERNATIONAL RESPONSE TO A
COUP.

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POPULAR SENTIMENT

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8. VENEZUELANES DESPERATELY WANT CHANGE. THEY WILL HAVE
TO BE GIVEN SOME "HEADS," ESPECIALLY THOSE OF CORRUPT
INDIVIDUALS. THE PEOPLE ALSO WANT ORDER--THEY WANT THINGS
TO WORK. KEY PROBLEMS ARE THE INEFFECTIVENESS OF THE
JUDICIAL SYSTEM AND MOST PUBLIC SERVICES. [] NOTED,
HOWEVER, THAT NOT ALL PUBLIC SERVICES ARE DISASTERS--THE
ELECTRIC POWER SYSTEM WORKS WELL. [] HAS SPOKEN FRANKLY
WITH PRESIDENT PEREZ (CAP) ABOUT THESE PROBLEMS AND CAP IS
SENSITIVE TO THEM. MCLEAN SAID IT MIGHT BE APPROPRIATE
FOR CAP TO LEAD AN INTERNATIONAL DISCUSSION ON THE
CORRUPTION ISSUE.

B1, B6

B1, B6

9. [] INDICATED THAT CAP WILL STICK TO ECONOMIC
REFORM. REFORMS WILL SLOWLY BECOME MORE INSTITUTIONALIZED
AND EVENTUALLY THE LEVEL OF TENSION IN THE COUNTRY WILL
DECLINE. HE QUOTED CAP AS SAYING THAT "IT RAINS AND THEN
IT CLEARS UP."

B1, B6

10. MCLEAN SAID WE ARE DISTURBED BY REPORTS THAT
POLITICIANS ARE PUSHING FOR CAP'S EARLY DEPARTURE. []
SAID CAP'S RESIGNATION, OR A DECREASE IN HIS TERM, WOULD
BE A "CIVIL COUP." IF CAP IS FORCED OUT NO ONE, INCLUDING
FORMER PRESIDENT CALDERA, WOULD BE ABLE TO EFFECTIVELY
GOVERN.

B1, B6

HOW THE U.S. CAN HELP

11. [] SAID THE USG COULD HELP VENEZUELA BY NOT BEING
SO INSISTENT ON DEBT PAYMENTS (HE DID NOT ELABORATE) AND
BY REDUCING TRADE FRICTIONS. HE MENTIONED THE TUNA
EMBARGO AND THE CEMENT ANTI-DUMPING/COUNTERVAILING DUTY

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CASES. HE ADDED THAT DEA COOPERATION WITH VENEZUELAN LAW ENFORCEMENT SHOULD BE VERY LOW PROFILE BECAUSE IT MIGHT AROUSE NATIONALIST SENTIMENTS.

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THE CHURCH

12. THE CHURCH'S ROLE IN THE CURRENT CRISIS IS LIMITED, BECAUSE "THANKFULLY" THE VENEZUELAN CHURCH IS NOT VERY POWERFUL.

DRUGS

13. [REDACTED] SAID THAT ILLEGAL BRAZILIAN MINERS ON VENEZUELA'S FRONTIER WITH BRAZIL ARE INCREASINGLY INVOLVED IN DRUG TRAFFICKING. HE DESCRIBED THE SAN ANTONIO SUMMIT [REDACTED] AS A SUCCESS, IN PART BECAUSE OF THE RAPPORT DEVELOPED BETWEEN WORKING LEVEL OFFICIALS OF THE COUNTRIES INVOLVED.
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